



NEWS RELEASE

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Hurricane Katrina #16 --- Health Tips For Rescue Workers

Baton Rouge – State health officials are issuing an infectious disease advisory for rescue workers who will be entering the area impacted by Hurricane Katrina. This advisory is directed towards: utilities workers, rescue personnel, emergency medical services staff, fire fighters, military personnel, and law enforcement personnel.

As operations in the affected area continue the risks of infectious diseases are rising. At this point, many people have sheltered in close quarters with limited or no access to running water or hygiene facilities. In addition, the floodwaters inundating the area provide a medium to carry several infectious diseases. As such, rescue workers should follow the guidelines below:

Food/water Borne Diseases

- Many of the illnesses faced in these situations are the result of people swallowing contaminated materials. It is important to wash hands as regularly as possible and use hand sanitizers if available. Additionally, avoid swallowing any water that has not been appropriately treated and only eat food that has been properly prepared.
- It is important to stay well hydrated while working in this climate. Currently, only bottled water is considered safe for drinking. If bottled water is not available, water from other sources is to be boiled for at least 10 minutes at a rolling boil. If this is not possible, disinfect one gallon of clear water with 1/4 tablespoon of fresh chlorine bleach.
- Food is essential for the optimal functioning of rescuers; however, it is important that only properly stored and prepared food be consumed. When possible, rescuers should take advantage of the specially prepared food provided for them. Do not eat fresh or cooked foods that have been contaminated by floodwater or that have not been effectively refrigerated or contained. This includes fruit and vegetables.

Bloodborne Diseases

When handling patients or victims, it is always important for rescuers to practice standard safety precautions to reduce the risk of bloodborne pathogens. Universal precautions include wearing protective gloves when handling patients or body fluids.

Airborne Diseases

Tuberculosis is endemic to Louisiana, and volunteers may encounter people who have the disease. Tuberculosis is usually transmitted by long-term close contact with people who are shedding the bacteria that cause the disease. At this time, tuberculosis is not considered to be a significant public health concern for volunteers. However, if a patient or victim is actively coughing, providing them with a surgical mask is an appropriate precaution.

Other Diseases

- Tetanus is a threat in any flood situation. This disease is caused by a common bacteria that is present in the environment and can cause lethal infections. Tetanus can be prevented with proper vaccination.
- Any bites or scratches from animals that rescuers incur require immediate evaluation by a physician.
- All injuries should be promptly and properly treated. All wounds should be cleaned and bandaged until evaluation.
- Animal and human remains may be encountered by rescuers. These bodies pose little infectious disease risk to rescue and recovery personnel; however it is still important to practice proper health and safety precautions.

Vaccines

Vaccines are expected to be available to rescuers in the next 24 to 48 hours. The vaccines that have been ordered include Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Tetanus and Diphtheria. Vaccine will be made available to volunteers who have not previously been vaccinated for these diseases.

For more health and safety information following Hurricane Katrina, visit www.dhhemergencynews.com

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